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# Natural Knowledge of God in the Philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas

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NATURAL KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF

SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS

BY

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER  
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M A Y  
1942

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## INTRODUCTION

From the works of various writers on the subject of natural theology, it appears that the possibility of natural knowledge of God's existence and of His attributes has often been questioned and has sometimes even been denied. Father Mc Cormick, in his Natural Theology, tells us that

from the time of Protagoras the Sophist (fifth century B.C.), who is reputed to have said: "Of the gods nothing can be known; neither that they are, nor that they are not," there has existed in philosophy a tendency to deny to the human mind the capability of attaining to anything ultimate or absolute.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, Father Joyce informs us that some philosophers hold

that although in order to account for the world of experience we are compelled to postulate an unknown ground of being, reason will carry us no further than this. No attribute can be affirmed of this ultimate ground except that it is unknown and unknowable.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Mc Cormick, J. F., S.J., Natural Theology, Loyola University Press, 1939, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup>Joyce, G. H., Principles of Natural Theology, Longmans, Green & Co., London, 1923, Vol. I, p. 237.

Cardinal Mercier speaks of the fundamental assumption of ignorance of metaphysical realities that permeates much of modern philosophy. There exists, he says,

in the intellectual atmosphere of the present day a prejudice against a science of metaphysics on the score of there being no special object for such a science to contemplate. Nothing is knowable, it is said, but what the senses can inform us about, and therefore what is supersensible, should any such reality exist, has no interest for the mind; what is unknowable had best be left to its obscurity.<sup>3</sup>

St. Thomas Aquinas states a doctrine that appears to be directly opposed to the philosophy of the Unknowable. Not only is natural knowledge of God possible to men, according to the philosophy of St. Thomas, but it is the only knowledge that satisfies him; until he acquires knowledge of the First Cause, man does not cease his quest for knowledge. The position of St. Thomas on this question is well expressed in the Contra Gentiles, where he says:

...knowledge of God is the last end of all human knowledge and actions.... Man has a natural desire to know the causes of whatever he sees; wherefore through wondering at what they saw, and ignoring its cause, men began to philosophize, and when they had discovered the cause they were at rest. Nor do they cease inquiring until they come to the first cause....<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Mercier, A Manual of Modern Scholastic Philosophy, translated by T. L. Parker and S. A. Parker, O.S.B., 8th edition, B. Herder Book Co., St. Louis, 1921, p. 413.

Op. cit., translation by English Dominicans, from the latest Leonine edition, Benziger Bros., New York, 1928, Vol. III, chap. xxv, p. 59.

Evidence of the oft-repeated denial of man's power to attain natural knowledge of God led the writer to make inquiry concerning the claims made by St. Thomas Aquinas in behalf of human reason and the manner in which it can acquire true and certain knowledge of the existence of God and His attributes. The inquiry had special reference to the attitude of those who hold that God, if He exists, can not be known without the aid of Revelation; the writer wished to learn the reasonableness of such an attitude, according to the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas.

This thesis reports, in a simple manner, the results of the writer's inquiry. Supported by references to the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas, the thesis aims to show that in the philosophy of St. Thomas, natural knowledge of God is possible. Man, by reasoning on the facts of immediate experience, can know with certainty that God exists and that certain attributes are to be essentially predicated of Him while others are to be denied of Him.

Having shown to what extent natural knowledge of God is possible, the metaphysic that validates the predications made of God will be explained. Without an understanding of St. Thomas' doctrine of the analogy of being, the reasonableness of making common predications of the finite and the infinite, of the creature and the Creator, might well be questioned. The thesis aims to indicate to the reader that it is St. Thomas' metaphysic of analogical predication that enables him, by natural reason, to conclude, from the data of sense experience, that, as First Being, the perfections of God's effects necessarily pre-exist in Him in a manner befitting His essence and that, therefore, the perfections of God can be named, analogically, from the

perfections of sensible beings.

A word concerning the references used may not be out of place. Since the thesis investigates the claims made by St. Thomas Aquinas for natural knowability of God, it is to be expected that the principal works consulted would be those of St. Thomas. The texts quoted are those discovered and selected by the writer from the works of St. Thomas, as expressive of his thought on the subject under discussion. The texts included in the thesis are a few of many that might have been selected from the Summa Theologica and the Summa Contra Gentiles to authenticate the writer's commentary. In three or four instances, quotations from St. Thomas were taken from secondary sources. Indebtedness to the author is in each of these cases, explicitly acknowledged.

It is not to be inferred from the above statement, that secondary sources were not used; on the contrary, they proved an indispensable aid in the elucidation of difficult points. The writer freely acknowledges her indebtedness to those who have provided the lover of Thomistic doctrine with scholarly treatises on the teachings of St. Thomas. Special acknowledgment is due the following for the help derived from the study of the works indicated:

Rev. R. Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., God, His Existence and His Nature.  
Volumes I and II.

Etienne Gilson, The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy.

Rev. G. H. Joyce, Principles of Natural Theology.

Dr. G. B. Phelan, St. Thomas and Analogy.

Rev. J. F. Mc Cormick, S. J., Natural Theology.

## CHAPTER I

### GOD'S EXISTENCE AND HIS ATTRIBUTES

#### AS KNOWN FROM MOTION

The problem of the knowledge that human reason, unaided by Revelation, can acquire of God, is fundamental to every system of philosophy. Its solution involves not only the philosopher's concept of God but also his theory of the nature of man. Thus it happens that some philosophers restrict man's knowledge to the world of sensible things; knowledge of God is then impossible. Others grant that intellectual knowledge is possible to man, but that God, if He exists, is far beyond the scope of human knowledge. Still others make knowledge of God a part of man's natural inheritance.

In the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas, certain knowledge of the existence of God can be acquired by human reason, independently of the truths made known by Revelation. Such knowledge, for St. Thomas, is acquired; it is not innate. God's existence is not intuitively known; but it can be known with certainty through the processes of human reason.

Knowledge of God, like all intellectual knowledge in the system of St. Thomas, is conditioned by the sensible. It transcends created being and leads ultimately to knowledge of "Him Who is",--the Divine Source of



all being. Still man's knowledge of God has its root, its origin,<sup>2</sup> in the things of sense.<sup>1</sup>

God's existence is, for St. Thomas, demonstrable; it is not, in itself, self-evident to us. Man, in his present state, can know with certainty that God is, but this knowledge is not immediately evident to him, because his knowledge is acquired, not directly, by means of knowledge of God's essence, but indirectly, by means of knowledge of His effects. Because man can not comprehend the essence of God, he can formulate no proposition concerning God in which the predicate is evidently included in the essence of the subject.<sup>2</sup>

Neither is the idea of God's existence innate, in the true sense of that word. The human intellect is naturally possessed of no ready-made

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<sup>1</sup>St. Thomas, Summa Contra Gentiles, translated by English Dominican Fathers from the latest Leonine edition, Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd., London, 1924, Vol. I, chap. xii, p. 23: ...although God transcends all sensibles and senses, His effects from which we take the proof that God exists, are sensible objects. Hence our knowledge, even of things which transcend the senses, originates from the senses.

St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, translated by Fathers of English Dominican Province, Second and Revised Edition, Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd., London, 1920, I a, q. 12, art. 12, cor.:

Our natural knowledge begins from sense. Hence our natural knowledge can go as far as it can be led by sensible things.

<sup>2</sup>St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 2, art. 1, cor.:

Now because we do not know the essence of God the proposition 'God is' is not self-evident to us; but needs must be demonstrated by things that are more known to us, though less known in their nature,--namely, by effects.

Contra Gent., I, chap. xii, p. 21:...because we are unable to see His essence, we come to know His existence not in Himself but in His effects.

ideas, but only with the potency to ideas, until the sensory organs provide the materials from which its ideas are derived. It should not be said that the idea of God is innate because man naturally desires happiness; obviously, all men do not identify happiness with the idea of possessing God, for many seek happiness in wealth, in honor, in pleasure, or in fame.<sup>3</sup> All men naturally desire happiness; but, since all men do not associate the idea of happiness with the idea of God, the natural desire of happiness does not indicate a natural or innate knowledge of God's existence.

Since the existence of God is not immediately evident to us and we have no innate knowledge of His existence; since the quiddity or essence of God is not the proper object of the intellect of man in his present state, the existence of God must be demonstrated, not by a priori, but by a posteriori reasoning; that is, by reasoning from effects immediately known to us, to their proper universal cause. The existence of effects of which our senses give us direct evidence, requires the existence of a pre-existing cause. Our knowledge of the essential nature of that cause may be incomplete and imperfect but its existence at least, is

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<sup>3</sup> St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 2, art. 1, ad 1 um:

...man naturally desires happiness, and what is naturally desired by man must be naturally known to him. This however, is not to know absolutely that God exists;...for many there are who imagine that man's perfect good which is happiness, consists in riches, and others in pleasure, and others in something else.

proven, by the existence of its effects.<sup>4</sup> The poem, for example, "is direct evidence of the existence, past or present, of the poet; the novel requires an author, the oil painting, an artist, and the score of a symphony, a composer of music. From every effect, of whatever kind it may be, we can obtain certain knowledge of the existence of its cause, for, from nothing, nothing proceeds.

In proving the existence of God, we are obliged by the very nature of our being, to begin with sensible things. From among the things of sense we are free to make choice of anything, great or small, upon which to base our observations,--the amoeba or the Rocky Mountain system,--either serves our purpose equally well. Either of these objects or any other creature that may be decided upon as a starting point furnishes the material for proving the existence of God in any one of the five ways explained by St. Thomas. Sensible being in its dynamic aspect, its static aspect, its contingency, its degree of perfection and finally its purposive direction to an end supplies the evidence needed for St. Thomas' proof for the exist-

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<sup>4</sup>St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 2, art. 2, cor.:

And from every effect the existence of its proper cause can be demonstrated, so long as its effects are better known to us; because since every effect depends upon its cause, if the effect exists, the cause must pre-exist. Hence the existence of God in so far as it is not self-evident to us, can be demonstrated from those of His effects which are known to us.

Ibid., ad 3 um: From effects not proportionate to the cause no perfect knowledge of that cause can be obtained. Yet from every effect the existence of the cause can be clearly demonstrated, and so we can demonstrate the existence of God from His effects; though from them we cannot perfectly know God as He is in His essence.

ence of God from motion, from efficient causality, from contingency, from gradations of perfection in things, and from final causality. Motion in created being implies the existence of a First Mover; from efficient causality we conclude the existence of an Uncaused Effective Cause; contingent being demands the existence of necessary being; the less perfect and the more perfect being furnish evidence of the existence of an all-perfect being; the action or movement of things to an end requires the direction of an intelligent cause. This immutable, necessary, all-perfect and intelligent First Cause to whose existence all sensible things give evidence, we call God.

Each of the five proofs is a convincing philosophic demonstration of the existence of God. St. Thomas himself gave preference to the proof from motion or becoming, in which every kind of change or motion,--qualitative, local or intellectual, is included. Since the detailed explanation of all the proofs would be impractical for our present purposes, consideration will be restricted to St. Thomas' proof from motion.

By motion, St. Thomas would have us understand the transition from potentiality to act, in anything in which such transition, change or becoming, occurs.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 2, art. 3, cor.:

For motion is nothing else than the reduction of something from potentiality to actuality.

Experience furnishes manifold instances of change or becoming. The amoeba may lose its individual existence to become part of a multicellular organism. The snow-capped Rockies present an ever-changing scene of splendor as they reflect the multitudinous rays of the sun. The seed becomes the tree; the stucco house acquires a surface of brick; the unlearned pupil becomes a Greek scholar; ice becomes water; it may then be heated until, in a gaseous state, it passes into the air. The ingredients of a cake mingle and are changed from a mixture of flour, sugar, milk, etc., to a golden brown, light-as-a-feather layer cake. From the beginning of life to its close, wherever we go, we witness the succession of changes constantly going on about us.

Every time our senses enable us to declare a thing to be, we infer its change or becoming. Every time we are assured by sensory evidence that a thing is, we imply its passage from a state of possible being or potency to that of existence or actual being. Every time we predicate being of any creature whatsoever, we can signify its passage from non-being to being. This change must have been effected through the actualizing influence of some being other than itself, for a thing can not be in potentiality and in actuality at one and the same time and in one and the same respect.<sup>6</sup> While a cake batter is batter, it is only

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<sup>6</sup>St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 2, art. 3, cor.:

Now it is not possible that the same thing should be at once in actuality and potentiality in the same respect, but only in different respect. For what is actually hot can not simultaneously be potentially hot; but it is simultaneously potentially cold. It is therefore impossible that in the same way a thing should be both mover and moved, i.e., that it should move itself.

potentially a cake; when it is actually a cake, it has ceased to be batter. It is inconsistent with the first principles of reason to say that it could remain the cake batter and at the same time be the feathery cake.

Since a thing can not at the same time and in the same respect be in potency and in act, it requires that something in act communicate actuality to the thing in potency; something in act must move that which was previously in potency to motion.<sup>7</sup>

And this other mover--what about it? If it is in motion, does not that very motion indicate the actualization of a potency in its regard? Does not its new determination imply the action upon it, or previous motion of some principle of determination? Is it not a moved mover? Thus the series of moved movers might be indefinitely continued. Assuming the series to be increased to the point of infinity, is the origin of motion accounted for? Or does motion require a mover that is itself unmoved,--a principle of becoming that can not itself become because it is the fullness of being?

An infinite series of movers would not explain the presence of motion in the universe, since each would be merely an intermediate or instrumental mover; and, since the series is regarded as infinite, there could be

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<sup>7</sup>St. Thomas, Contra Gent., I, chap. xiii, p. 25:

Nothing is at the same time in act and in potentiality in respect of the same thing. Now whatever is in motion, as such, is in potentiality, because motion is the act of that which is in potentiality, as such. Whereas whatever moves, as such, is in act, for nothing acts except in so far as it is in act. Therefore nothing is both mover and moved in respect of the same movement. Hence nothing moves itself.

Cfr. Coffey, P., Ph. D., Ontology or The Theory of Being, Second edition, Longmans Green & Co., New York, 1918, pp. 51-68, for discussion of the nature of "change".

no first or principal mover. Without a first mover, there would originate no motion to be imparted to any of the series of moved movers and hence there would never be any motion.

There is but one alternative: Since motion exists--and it is evident everywhere,--there exists a first mover, itself unmoved. This first unmoved mover is the ultimate principle or act, whence originate all motion, all change, all becoming.<sup>8</sup> In this prime mover, Whom we call God, all is being. He is; others may, through His act, become. Essentially immutable, God is being without becoming; being which is pure act. This means that in God there is no potentiality but only unlimited act or existence of which He is Himself the principle; God is self-subsistent being, or being a se.

Having ascertained the existence of a Prime Mover, God, we naturally ask if it is possible to know anything of His manner of existence, or if we are restricted by the limitations of reason, to the knowledge that God exists. We have no immediate knowledge of God's essence; the very limitations of our nature imply the inadequacy of natural knowledge of what

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<sup>8</sup>St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 2, art. 3, cor.:

Whatever is in motion must be put in motion by another...and that by another again. But this can not go on to infinity, because then there would be no first mover, and consequently no other mover; seeing that subsequent movers move only in as much as they are put in motion by the first mover; as the staff moves only because it is put in motion by the hand. Therefore it is necessary to arrive at a first mover, put in motion by no other; and this everyone understands to be God.

Cfr. Rev. R. Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., God, His Existence and His Nature. Translated from Fifth French Edition, by Dom Bede Rose, O.S.B., D.D. B. Herder Book Co., St. Louis, 1939, Vol. I, pp. 261-289, for a detailed discussion of the proof of God's existence from motion.

God is. There are, however, means of knowing what God is not.<sup>9</sup> We shall now consider what can be known about God by saying what He is not.

It was upon the dynamic aspect of reality that St. Thomas based his proof of the existence of a Prime Mover. But it was not only the existence of a Prime Mover as such, that St. Thomas wished to prove. He did not wish to establish proof of the existence of God only as the first principle of motion (first mover) but as First Being. Motion, for St. Thomas, presupposes being. If God is the Prime Mover, if all motion finds its ultimate cause in Him, it is because motion is being; and God, as the First Cause of all being, is by implication the First Cause of all motion or becoming. God is the Being upon Whom all created being and all becoming depend, but Who depends upon no being for either His existence or His perfection. That is why we refer to God as the Supreme Being.

It has been shown that God, Who is the Prime Mover, is Himself necessarily immutable or unchangeable. This does not mean that God is in a state of perpetual inertia. Movement is synonymous with a principle of

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<sup>9</sup>St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q, 2, Prol.:

When the existence of a thing has been ascertained there remains the further question of the manner of its existence, in order that we may know its essence. Now because we cannot know what God is, but rather what He is not, we have no means for considering how God is but rather how He is not.

St. Thomas, Contra Gent., I, chap. xiv, p.33:

Accordingly having proved that there is a first being which we call God, it behoves us to inquire into His nature.

Now in treating of the divine essence the principal method to be followed is that of remotion. For the divine essence by its immensity surpasses every form to which our intellect reaches; and thus we cannot apprehend it by knowing what it is. But we have some knowledge thereof by knowing what it is not.



determination, of actualization. God, as immutable Being, cannot receive determination from any source whatsoever. In Him there is no potentiality. But God is not inert Being; He can and does act; more properly still, He is act, act only; He is pure act.<sup>10</sup>

In an immutable being there is no becoming, no transition from non-being to being. His being neither begins nor ceases to be; from eternity unto eternity He is; He can not not-be. Time is the measure of movement, of the changeable; eternity is the immeasurableness of the immutable. God is immutable, therefore He is eternal.<sup>11</sup>

In predicating eternity of God, we have implied His infinity. There are no limits to any aspect of His actuality; He is infinite Being.<sup>12</sup>

Because God is pure act with no admixture of becoming, His being excludes materiality and composition. Matter is not a principle of determination; it is the determinable element in being; it is pure potency. From

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<sup>10</sup>St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 3, art. 1, cor.:

Now it has already been proved that God is the First Mover and is Himself unmoved;...the first being must of necessity be in act and in no way in potentiality.

<sup>11</sup>St. Thomas, Contra Gent., I, chap. xv, p.34:

For whatever begins or ceases to be, suffers this through movement or change. Now it has been shown that God is altogether unchangeable. Therefore He is eternal, having neither beginning nor end.

<sup>12</sup>St. Thomas, Contra Gent., I, chap. xliii, pp. 95 & 96:

An act is the more perfect, according as it is less mingled with potentiality. Wherefore every act that has an admixture of potentiality has a limit to its perfection: while the act which has no admixture of potentiality has no limit to its perfection. Now God is pure act without any potentiality....Therefore He is infinite.

this it is clear that God, in Whom there is no potentiality, is immaterial.<sup>13</sup> What is immaterial is incorporeal; therefore, God is incorporeal. Furthermore, every body is quantitative and its constituent parts are in potentiality to change. Since there is no potentiality in God, God is incorporeal.<sup>14</sup>

To predicate of God the attributes of immateriality, incorporeality,--pure act excluding composition,--this is equivalent to saying that God is simple; for, being in which there is no matter, no composition, no potency, is simple being. God, then, is truly simple.<sup>15</sup>

That which is simple is indivisible; but being that is undivided and indivisible is necessarily one. Furthermore, pure act is incapable of multiplication or division, for either of these would limit the perfection of

<sup>13</sup>St. Thomas, Contra Gent., I, chap. xiii, p. 38:

Matter does not become the cause of an actual thing except by being altered and changed. Therefore if God is immutable, He can nowise be a cause of things as their matter.

St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 3, art. 2, cor.:

It is impossible that matter should exist in God,...because matter is in potentiality. But...God is pure act, without any potentiality.

<sup>14</sup>St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 3, art. 1, cor.:

...no body is in motion unless it be put in motion....Now...God is the First Mover, and is Himself unmoved. Therefore it is clear that God is not a body.

St. Thomas, Contra Gent., I, chap. xx, p. 42:

Every quantitative substance is somehow in potentiality....Now every body is a quantitative substance. Therefore every body is in potentiality. But God is not in potentiality, but is pure act....Therefore God is not a body.

<sup>15</sup>St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 3, art. 7, cor.:

...there is neither composition of quantitative parts in God, since He is not a body; nor composition of form and matter,...Therefore it is clear that God is nowise composite, but is altogether simple.

pure act and thus destroy it. God is pure act; God is simple Being; God is, therefore, supremely one.<sup>16</sup>

Because God is absolutely simple there is no distinction between His essence and His existence. In material or composite things, existence is the actualization of the essence. Essence and existence, like matter and form, are related as potency and act.<sup>17</sup> In God, there is no matter, no potency; He is pure form, pure act. Therefore His essence is His existence.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 11, art. 4, cor.:

Since one is an undivided being, if anything is supremely one it must be supremely being, and supremely undivided. Now both of these belong to God. For He is supremely being inasmuch as His being is not determined by any nature to which it is adjoined; since He is being itself, subsistent, absolutely undetermined. But He is supremely undivided inasmuch as He is divided neither actually, nor potentially, by any mode of division, since He is altogether simple....Hence it is manifest that God is one in the supreme degree.

<sup>17</sup>St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 3, art. 4, cor.:

...existence must compared to essence, if the latter is a distinct reality, as actuality to potentiality.

St. Thomas, Contra Gent., II, chap. lxxi, p. 179:

...neither is there anything that makes one thing out of matter and form, except the agent which reduces the potentiality to act, as Aristotle proves (8Metaph.); for matter and form are related as potentiality and act.

<sup>18</sup>St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 3, art. 4, cor.:

...that thing, whose existence differs from its essence, must have its existence caused by another. But this cannot be true of God; because we call God the first efficient cause. Therefore it is impossible that in God His existence should differ from His essence.

St. Thomas, Contra Gent., I, chap. xxii, p. 55:

Existence denotes a kind of actuality; since a thing is said to exist not through being in potentiality, but through being in act. Now everything to which an act is becoming and which is distinct from that act, is related thereto as potentiality to act; since act and potentiality are reciprocal terms. Accordingly, if the divine essence is distinct from its existence, it follows that His essence and existence are mutually related as potentiality and act. Now it has been proved that in God there is nothing of potentiality and that He is pure act. Therefore God's essence is not distinct from His existence.

All motion depends ultimately on the Prime Mover, God. Wherever there is motion, the mover must be in some manner present to the object moved. Since God is the Prime Mover, and motion is found everywhere in the universe, God must be everywhere present. It is not as part of the essence of the thing moved that God is present but as the efficient cause of the motion and of the being of the object. As Prime Mover, God is the cause of the becoming of a thing and He is present to it in that sense. God is also the cause of its continuance in being. Since God is the cause in fieri and also the cause in esse of all created things, He is present to all existing things;--therefore, He is present everywhere.<sup>19</sup>

To sum up: We have seen how St. Thomas, from the universal evidence of motion, reasoned to the necessary existence of a First Mover. As the first principle of all motion, the First Mover must be unmoved, i.e., immutable. The first efficient cause of all becoming must be being without becoming. This immutable Being is God.

From the immutability of God, we deduce His attributes of eternity and infinity. Containing not the shadow or possibility of change, God is without potentiality of any kind. Therefore, God is immaterial, incorporeal, non-composite, or simple, and absolutely one. Because God is Pure Act, His essence is not distinct from His existence.

Thus has St. Thomas led us, from the evidence of motion, sensible evidence, to the reasoned conclusion that God exists. Wherever there is

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<sup>19</sup>St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 8, art. 3, cor.:

God is in all things by His power, inasmuch as all things are subject to His power; He is by His presence in all things, as all things are bare and open to His eyes; He is in all things by His essence, inasmuch as He is present to all as the cause of their being.

finite or contingent being, there God gives us evidence of His Being; for He is present to His creatures, as the First Principle of their becoming and also of their continuance in being. Creatures exist; therefore God exists. All creatures give evidence of the existence of God; to rational beings, their testimonies are "exceedingly credible".<sup>20</sup>

The creature is so far removed from its First Cause, that, in comparison with God it can scarcely be said to be. Yesterday it was not; today it is; tomorrow it may have passed out of its present state of being forever. All finite existence is contingent and essentially limited; every creature from the least to the greatest, could conceivably not be. And yet it is the existence of the finite that testifies to the existence of the Infinite. It is from knowledge of the creature's imperfect being that we rise to knowledge of Him Who is the plenitude of perfection, the fullness of Being. And since God is essentially, since God is Being a se, we know that His mode of existence must be removed from that of His creatures, by the difference between Infinite and finite. We know, therefore, that, unlike His creatures whose participation in being is essentially limited, God, the self-subsistent Being, is not changeable, is not finite, is not composite, is not material, is not a body, is not manifold, is not restricted by limitations of either His essence or His existence.

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<sup>20</sup>Psalm XCII, verse 7: Thy testimonies are made exceedingly credible.

## CHAPTER TWO

### POSITIVE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD AS KNOWN FROM HIS EFFECTS

What positive predications can we make of the infinitely perfect God? We have applied to Him negative names; but these do not in themselves signify positive perfections that are intrinsic to the nature of God; they indicate rather the distance between God and the creature.<sup>1</sup> Can we attribute to God any positive names, truly representative of His perfections? And if so, upon what do we base our predications?

Our starting point is once more the creature, any creature, since every creature is possessed of some perfection or being. Moreover, every created object is an effect of the Divine Agent; whatever perfection or being the creature possesses has been bestowed upon it by God.

If God did not possess the perfections of created being, He could not be their Cause. No cause can give to its effects what is lacking to its own being. Conversely, whatever perfection exists in an effect must

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<sup>1</sup>St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 13, art. 2, cor.:

Negative names applied to God or signifying His relation to creatures manifestly do not at all signify His substance, but rather express the distance of the creature from Him, or His relation to something else, or rather, the relation of creatures to Himself.

pre-exist in the cause that produced it.<sup>2</sup> The cause may or may not be superior to the effect in its manner or degree of possessing the perfection in which the effect shares; it can not be inferior to it. Man, for example, may produce a sound by setting his vocal cords in vibration; or, he may build a house for himself; or he may become the cause of a being like himself by becoming a father. But man is limited in his causality by the degree in which he himself possesses being. His being is participated, contingent, relative, and not absolute. God is infinite in His being; therefore, the total power of causality is His, absolutely and eternally; the perfections of participated beings necessarily pre-exist in God.

That creatures bear a resemblance to God is a truth that human reason can easily comprehend. Every thing acts according as it is; it acts; therefore, every agent must communicate to its effect at least some likeness to itself. Similarly it may be said that every effect in some way

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<sup>2</sup>St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 4, art. 2, cor.:

Whatever perfection exists in an effect must be found in the effective cause; either in the same formality if it is a univocal agent--as when man reproduces man; or in a more eminent degree, if it is an equivocal agent--thus in the sun is the likeness of whatever is generated by the sun's power. Now it is plain that the effect pre-exists virtually in the efficient cause; and although to pre-exist in the potentiality of a material cause is to pre-exist in a more imperfect way, since matter as such is imperfect, and an agent as such is perfect; still to pre-exist virtually in the efficient cause is to pre-exist not in a more imperfect but in a more perfect way. Since therefore God is the first effective cause of things, the perfections of all things must pre-exist in God in a more eminent way.

resembles its cause.<sup>3</sup> This is a principle with which we are all familiar in practical things, though we may never have heard the principle stated. If, for example, ten or more women are given the recipe for a cake and each is supplied with the same kind of flour, shortening, and whatever ingredients are called for; if each bakes her cake in the same oven and can regulate its temperature as she chooses,--the result is going to be ten cakes that differ from each other in texture, lightness, flavor, color, height and in every characteristic proper to a cake. Every woman has her own distinctive culinary ability; the effect of her labors depends upon the excellence or mediocrity of her skill.

Every field of endeavor provides similar examples of the resemblance of an effect to its cause. Many dramatists before and since the days of Shakespeare have handled the themes Shakespeare used. But only one man has achieved the dramatic effects of Shakespeare because there has been but one Shakespeare to communicate to his works the true Shakespearean likeness. Who would confuse a Chopin waltz with a Strauss? Or a Beethoven sonata with a Mozart? Or a Raphael Madonna with a Botticelli?

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<sup>3</sup>St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 4, art. 3, cor.:

For since every agent reproduces itself so far as it is an agent, and everything acts according to the manner of its form, the effect must in some way resemble the form of the agent.

St. Thomas, Contra Gent., I, chap. xxix, p. 71.

For effects that fall short of their causes do not agree with them in name and ratio, and yet there must needs be some likeness between them, because it is of the nature of action that a like agent should produce a like action, since everything acts according as it is in act.



Or a poem by Wordsworth with one by Coleridge? Each of these artists gave to his work something which no one else could possibly give, namely, a "likeness" to himself. Similarly, the Divine Author has communicated to His numerous works various degrees of likeness to Himself.

In predicating created perfections of God, we distinguish between the perfection, as such, and the manner in which it is realized; only the perfection per se is predicated of God. Only those created perfections are predicated of God, whose concept involves no imperfection. A created perfection in which imperfection is essentially included, can not be predicated of God. Such a perfection, for example, is rationality; for rationality connotes the idea of composition. Perfections whose definition includes materiality, or composition or any other condition that implies potentiality,--"mixed" perfections--, are not found in God in their proper nature; they may, however, be attributed to Him virtually, that is, causally.<sup>4</sup>

Terms, whose definition includes no concept of materiality, of composition or of essential limitation, are called pure perfections, e.g.,

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<sup>4</sup>Garrigou-Lagrange, God, His Existence and His Nature, Vol. 2, p. 33: Of course, any perfection (such as rationality or animality) which essentially includes imperfection, cannot be called a divine attribute. These mixed perfections are not in God formally but only virtually, in that He can bring them into existence.

St. Thomas, Contra Gent., I, chap. xxx, p. 72:

For since every perfection of creatures is to be found in God, albeit in another and more eminent way, whatever terms denote perfection absolutely and without any defect whatever are predicated of God and of other things; for instance, goodness, wisdom, and so forth. But any term that denotes such like perfections together with a mode proper to creatures, cannot be said of God....

goodness, life, intelligence, wisdom, truth. Pure perfections are predicated of God formally; that is, they are said to be in God, with the essential characteristics stated in their definition. The pure perfection, as such, is what properly and intrinsically constitutes Divine Being; this implies that the manner in which the perfection is possessed by God is far removed from the imperfect manner in which the creature has the same perfection.<sup>5</sup> We predicate the pure perfection of both the creature and God, but we remove from the idea of the perfection the imperfect manner in which it is found in the creature; we say that God possesses the perfection eminently; that is, in a manner immeasurably higher than that proper to the creature's finite existence.<sup>6</sup>

Our knowledge of pure perfections is conditioned by the object in which we discovered them, e.g., being, goodness, or intelligence. Still, as regards what is signified by the name being, or goodness, or intelligence, or any other pure perfection apprehended by us in its finite way

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<sup>5</sup> Joyce, G. H., Principles of Natural Theology, Longmans Green & Co., London, 1923, p. 113, footnote:

A thing is said to contain a perfection formally, when the perfection in question is found in it with the same essential characteristics which are expressed in the definition. It contains it eminently, when the perfection exists in it in an altogether higher manner, in such wise that the same definition is not verified in the two cases.

<sup>6</sup> St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 13, art. 4, cor.:

...our knowledge of God is derived from the perfections which flow from Him to creatures, which perfections are in God in a more eminent way than in creatures.

of existing, it is more properly predicated of God than it is of the creature; it belongs to the creature only by way of participation. As regards the mode of predication, however, the term good or intelligent applies primarily to the finite objects, (good book; intelligent child), from which we acquired our idea of the perfection.<sup>7</sup>

What are those various names, derived from God's effects, formally predicated of God because they name perfections that are intrinsic to the nature of God?

God is the fullness of Being; He is "supremely being".<sup>8</sup> To him must belong the transcendental properties of being as such, namely, unity, truth and goodness.

All being is good. But the goodness of created being is participated while God is good in virtue of His essence.<sup>9</sup> He is not merely good, He is

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<sup>7</sup>St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 13, art. 3, cor.:

Therefore as to the names applied to God, there are two things to be considered--viz., the perfections which they signify, such as goodness, life, and the like, and their mode of signification. As regards what is signified by the names, they belong properly to God, and more properly than they belong to creatures, and are applied primarily to Him. But as regards their mode of signification, they do not properly and strictly apply to God; for their mode of signification applies to creatures.

<sup>8</sup>St. Thomas, Contra Gent., I, chap. xiii, p. 33:

...there is something that is supremely being. And this we call God.

<sup>9</sup>St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 6, art. 3, cor.:

God...is good essentially. For everything is called good according to its perfection. God...has every kind of perfection by His own essence; therefore He Himself...is good essentially.

St. Thomas, Contra Gent., I, chap. xxxviii, p. 84:

That which is can participate something, but being itself can participate nothing; because that which participates is potentiality, whereas being is act. Now, God is being itself....Therefore, He is good not by participation, but essentially.

goodness itself. Because He is intrinsically good, He has caused His effects to share in His goodness by giving them existence or actual being with the perfection proper to them.<sup>10</sup>

All things are true. But of God it must be said He is infinitely true; He is Truth itself. Truth as a divine attribute will be spoken of in somewhat greater detail in connection with the divine attribute of knowledge.

In naming God from His creatures, as we do when we say He is Being, or He is good, the words being or good as they apply to God, can not mean exactly what they mean when they are predicated of the creature. The creature is and God is; between the manner in which the creature possesses being and God's existence there is an infinite difference. Existence is essential to God. Actual existence on the part of the creature is dependent on many factors and each of these factors depends ultimately upon God. If we consider our ideas of good, we find that, although they originated in created objects, they do not always have the same meaning even as they apply to creatures. A word like human is invariable in meaning; it can be defined

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<sup>10</sup>St. Thomas, Contra Gent., I, chap. xxxvii, p. 83:

The bestowal of being and goodness proceeds from goodness.... For the good of a thing is naturally its act and perfection. Now a thing acts through being in act: and by acting it bestows being and goodness on other things....Again, the notion of the good is that it is something appetible: and this is an end. And the end moves the agent to act. Hence good is said to be diffusive of self and being. Now, this diffusion is becoming to God: for it has been shown...that He is the cause of being in other things.

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St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 6, art. 4, cor.:

Everything is therefore called good from the divine goodness, as from the first exemplary effective and final principle of all goodness.

in terms of genus and difference. Because it permits of logical definition it is called a univocal term. Words like being, goodness, and truth are non-univocal; they transcend and include all genera; therefore, they may be used to signify things that differ essentially. The word, goodness, for example, does not indicate any specific nature as does the word animal or man. Until we predicate good of a particular thing, we do not know exactly what is meant. For example, a stone may be termed good in the ontological order, for the stone is possessed of being. A tree or a horse may be called good, in the physical order. If the word good is predicated of a man, the reference is usually to the moral order. While the word, good, does not express a generic or specific nature, it does signify a perfection that is capable, as we have seen, of existing according to essentially different kinds of being. Because the concept, good, is formally independent of any particular mode of existence, it can be predicated of all beings, whether these be finite or infinite. The stone, the plant, the animal, man and God,--all may be named good but in a non-univocal way.<sup>11</sup> That is, the goodness of each of these beings varies as do the essence and manner of existence proper to each,--the degree to which each effect is a similitude of the Divine Agent. The common predication of goodness to essentially

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<sup>11</sup>St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 13, art. 5, cor.:

God is more distant from creatures than any creatures are from each other. But the distance of some creatures makes any univocal predication of them impossible, as in the case of those things which are not in the same genus. Therefore, much less can anything be predicated univocally of God and creatures....

different beings is based on analogy or proportional unity.<sup>12</sup> The metaphysic of analogical predication can not be treated at length here; it forms the subject matter of the entire next chapter.

Some predications of God relate to His essence. These are known to us negatively only. We learned in the first chapter that God is not material, not composite; He is immutable; therefore, He is infinite and eternal. These perfections are not to be understood in a purely negative sense. The denial of imperfections and limitations of the being and existence of God implies the affirmation of His absolute perfection. A negation is understood only on the basis of a positive predication. If we deny the possibility of positive attribution we implicitly deny the possibility of negation and thus render God unknowable.<sup>13</sup>

Of the attributes relative to God's operations, some are immanent; others name God as the Principle of external Divine effects. The immanent

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<sup>12</sup>St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 13, art. 5, cor.:

Univocal predication is impossible between God and creatures. The reason of this is that every effect which is not an adequate result of the power of the efficient cause, receives the similitude of the agent not in its full degree but in a measure that falls short....Therefore it must be said that these names [ goodness, wisdom ] are said of God and creatures in an analogous sense....

<sup>13</sup>St. Thomas, De Potentia, q. 7, art. 5, quoted by Garrigou-Lagrange, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 212.:

These perfections are not to be taken simply in a negative sense. To say that God is living, does not merely mean that He is not non-living, that He is not like inanimate beings. A negation is always understood on the basis of an affirmation, for every negative proposition is proved by an affirmation, and hence if the human intellect could not positively affirm anything about God, it could not deny anything about Him, and He would be absolutely unknowable.

attributes name God as the First Cause and Divine Exemplar of the highest perfections of this earth's most excellent being,--man. Man has intelligence, will and life; therefore, God, in Whom these perfections must necessarily pre-exist in all possible plenitude,<sup>14</sup> is intelligent; He has will; He is a living God.

We know that God is intelligent for He has made man an intelligent being. Man, unlike the lower creatures, is not limited in his possessions to his own form. He knows other objects by uniting the form of the object known to his intellect. Since man has been given a natural capacity for knowledge, intelligence must pre-exist in God, for all created perfections are finite participations in the unlimited perfection of God.

Knowledge, in the Thomistic sense, demands the presence of the object known in the subject knowing.<sup>15</sup> The manner in which it is or becomes present to the knower, depends on the mode or kind of existence proper to the one knowing.<sup>16</sup> In man, knowledge begins in the senses; by means of an

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<sup>14</sup>St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 14, art. 1, ad 1 um:  
...perfections flowing from God to creatures exist in a higher state in God Himself.

Ibid., q. 13, art. 3, cor.:  
...our knowledge of God is derived from the perfections which flow from Him to creatures, which perfections are in God in a more eminent way than in creatures.

<sup>15</sup>St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 14, art. 1, ad 3 um:  
Knowledge is according to the mode of the one who knows; for the thing known is in the knower according to the mode of the knower.

<sup>16</sup>St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 84, art. 1, cor.:  
So also the intellect, according to its own mode, receives under conditions of immateriality and immobility, the species of material and mobile bodies; for the received is in the receiver according to the mode of the receiver.

abstractive process, the form of the object known is united with the intellect. By means of this received form, man knows the object. Human knowledge is at first potential; when it becomes actual it may be knowledge of a particular, e.g., of a particular man; or, it may be knowledge of a common nature. When we say God is intelligent, we attribute to Him the knowledge of Himself and of all other things,--of all possible, as well as of all actual beings. This knowledge is His simply, without the imperfections of abstraction from the material, which conditions human knowledge. We deny that knowledge in God is in any sense dependent on things. God does not know things because they are; things are because God knows them. It is because things are present to the thought of God, that He knows them; it is because He knows them and wills to produce them, that they become actually existing objects.<sup>17</sup>

God contains, or rather, He is, essentially, all the perfection that is contained in the essence of created beings according to their various degrees of participation in God's perfection. God must know all the ways in which He can cause His perfection to be participated.<sup>18</sup> An architect

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<sup>17</sup> St. Thomas, Contra Gent., I, chap. 11, p. 113:

Since all that is beside His essence is caused by Him:... it must needs be that if the aforesaid forms are outside God, they are caused by Him. Now He is the cause of things by His intellect....Therefore in order that these intelligible forms may exist, it is required that previously in the order of nature God should understand them.

<sup>18</sup> St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 14, art. 6. cor.:

...the nature proper to each thing consists in some degree of participation in the divine perfection. Now God could not be said to know Himself perfectly unless He knew all the ways in which His own perfection can be shared by others. Neither could He know the very nature of being perfectly, unless he knew all modes of being.



first knows his buildings as his ideas of them or plans were present to his mind. His knowledge of them after they have been constructed does not depend upon his study of the buildings as they exist. His knowledge of them, in virtue of having made "blueprints" of them, is superior to that of the person who "knows" the house from having studied its structure, appointments, the type of materials used, etc.<sup>19</sup> If a woman who baked a cake were asked if it was made with sweet or sour milk and if its flavoring included vanilla, it would not be reasonable for her to say that she (who made the cake) would have to taste it before she could name its ingredients. Before things exist as things, they exist somewhere, as thoughts. Even human agents, in the exercise of their participated efficiency or causality, work according to pre-conceived or pre-existing forms or ideas of the thing to be made, which they have "in mind". God, the First Cause of all things, produced His effects to the likeness of a form existing in the Divine Mind.<sup>20</sup>

God knows all things through His divinely simple essence. God knows

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<sup>19</sup>Farrell, W. Rev., Companion to the Summa, Sheed & Ward, New York, 1941, Vol. I, chap. 4, p. 79.:

God is the architect of the universe; He needs no instruction on the product of His creative act. He is the cause of everything; of course He knows all that is....Everything that exists was made according to the plan of the divine architect, made to the scale laid down by the mind of God.

<sup>20</sup>St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 15, art. 1, cor.:

...the likeness of a house pre-exists in the mind of the builder. And this may be called the idea of the house, since the builder intends to build his house like to the form conceived in his mind. As then the world was not made by chance, but by God acting by His intellect,...there must exist in the divine mind a form to the likeness of which the world was made.

all things as they are, from His own divine essence down to the least of creatures. God's being is not only conformed to His intellect; it is the act of His intellect; we may say, therefore, that there is truth in God's intellect. God's knowledge or understanding is the cause of every other being; His intellect has made things to express a certain degree of likeness to His divine essence. Since every creature is essentially what God has determined it to be, God apprehends every creature as it is. There is, then, no inequality between the Divine intellect and created beings; therefore, there is truth in the Divine intellect.<sup>21</sup> Not only can we say that there is truth in God, but, because His knowledge is the cause or measure of the being of every creature, His knowledge is also the cause of the truth of things; that is, of their conformity to His knowledge of them. His truth is likewise the measure of the truth of every created intellect. For human knowledge is true if it conforms to things and things are true because they conform to the Divine Mind. Truth is the conformity of thought and thing. Now God is First in the order of the intelligible as He is First in the order of Being. Therefore, God is the first and supreme Truth. Because God is His own essence, we may say further, that, as regards truth of the intellect or of things, God IS His own truth, or

simply, God is Truth.<sup>22</sup>

Because God is intelligence, He is also will. Our own nature teaches us the relation of will to intellect. The human intellect knows the good, or it may present several things as good. The human will inclines to one or another of the good things because it is naturally inclined to the known good. This tendency is called rational appetency; it is because appetency follows knowledge that we say will follows intellect.<sup>23</sup>

The tendency to seek its own good is proper to the nature of every living thing. The vine extends its growth in the direction of the object about which it can climb; the ant houses and supplies food to the green aphid so that it may be nourished by the fluid the aphid secretes; the spider feeds upon the dead body of the captured fly while the bee "embalms"

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<sup>22</sup>St. Thomas, Cont. Gent., I, chap. lxii, p. 132:

Now the divine truth is the measure of all truth. For the truth of our intellect is measured by the thing that is outside the mind, since our intellect is said to be true from the very fact that it accords with the thing. And the truth of a thing is measured according to the divine intellect which is the cause of things....since God is the first intellect and the first intelligible, it follows that the truth of every intellect must be measured by His truth....Hence the divine truth is the first, supreme and most perfect truth.

Ibid., chap. lx, p. 129: Now God is His own essence. Therefore, whether we speak of the truth of the mind, or of the truth of the thing, God is His own truth.

<sup>23</sup>St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 19, art. 1, cor.:

There is will in God, as there is intellect; since will follows upon intellect. For as natural things have actual existence by their form, so the intellect is actually intelligent by its intelligible form. Now everything has this aptitude towards its natural form, that when it has it not it tends towards it; and when it has it, it is at rest therein. It is the same with every natural perfection, which is a natural good. This aptitude to good in things without knowledge is called natural appetite.

the dead fly to prevent pollution by its decay. The dog may victimize a mouse but he will not eat it after he has killed it; the cat kills the mouse in order to feed upon it. Plants and animals follow blindly the natural appetites that direct them to the attainment of their own good and that of the species. The free actions of man are subject to intelligent choice, for man has the higher faculties of intellect and will. It follows then, that in God, Who is pure intelligence, there is will.<sup>24</sup>

It may be well to repeat that in attributing intelligence and will to God, the predication is formal. That is, the meaning is not that intelligence and will exist virtually in God inasmuch as He causes them to exist in creatures. These attributes are not in God as the oak tree is in the acorn; they belong to God in virtue of His essence; because God is God, He is intelligent and living. Because God is essentially intelligent, there are intelligent created beings; their intelligence is a finite likeness of God's intelligence. Because God is life, creatures have life. Only that which is living can communicate life to another; the dead oak grows no acorns. It is because God is intelligence, is life, is goodness, is Being, that He communicated intelligence, life,

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

...intellectual natures have a like aptitude to good as apprehended through its intelligible form; so as to rest therein when possessed, and when not possessed to seek to possess it, both of which pertain to the will. Hence in every intellectual being there is will, just as in every sensible being there is animal appetite. And so there must be will in God, since there is intellect in Him.

goodness or being to His effects.<sup>25</sup>

In the part of the chapter just completed, we considered God in Himself, as He makes known the perfections of His Being through His created similitudes. We now ask ourselves if there is anything further to be predicated of God by considering His as the active Principle of His external effects. God has produced manifold effects. Do these exhaust the power of God? Or can limits be assigned to His power?

The power of God is purely active since there is no potentiality in God. Because God is pure act, because He is First Being and the Principle of all other beings, there must be power of the highest degree in God.<sup>26</sup> This power is not to be thought of as distinct from His intellect or will; it is rather the act of His intellect or of His will. The distinction between God's power and His knowledge is a product of the mind; in the Divine

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<sup>25</sup>St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 13, art. 2, cor.:

Therefore the aforesaid names [ life, goodness, etc. ] signify the divine substance, but in an imperfect manner, even as creatures represent it imperfectly. So when we say God is good, the meaning is not, God is the cause of goodness, or God is not evil; but the meaning is, whatever good we attribute to creatures, pre-exists in God, and in a more excellent and higher way. Hence it does not follow that God is good, because He causes goodness, but rather, on the contrary, He causes goodness in things because He is good; according to what Augustine says (De Doctr. Christ, i, 32), because He is good, we are.

<sup>26</sup>St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 25, art. 1, cor.:

For it is manifest that everything, according as it is in act and is perfect, is the active principle of something.... Now...God is pure act, simply and in all ways perfect.... Whence it most fittingly belongs to Him to be an active principle.... On the other hand, the notion of active principle is consistent with active power.... It remains therefore that in God there is active power in the highest degree.

Reality, God's power is not really distinct from His essence.<sup>27</sup>

Because God is essentially infinite, His power, through which His essence acts, is infinite. Therefore, God can do whatever can be done, whatever is not an implied contradiction of His intelligence.<sup>28</sup>

By an act of His divine power, God created the world. He did not make it; He created it out of no pre-existing substance. Out of nothing anterior to Himself did God, Who is the totality of all possible being, derive any substance from which He produced the world. Creatures were made wholly by God. This is the only kind of production that would be worthy of the nature of God. He is Being per se and a se; creatures hold their being ab alio; that other, upon Whom they ultimately depend for their existence is God.<sup>29</sup> How could God, in Whom there is not the

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid. loc. cit. ad 4 um:

Power is predicated of God not as something really distinct from His knowledge and will, but as differing from them logically; inasmuch as power implies a notion of a principle putting into execution what the will commands and what knowledge directs, which three things in God are identified.

<sup>28</sup> St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 25, art. 3, cor.:

...God is called omnipotent because He can do all things that are possible absolutely,...possible if the predicate is not incompatible with the subject...as for instance, that a man is a donkey.

<sup>29</sup> St. Thomas, Cont. Gent., II, chap. xvi, p. 21:

For if a thing is an effect of God, either something exists before it, or not. If not, our point is proved, namely that God produces an effect from no pre-existing thing. If however something exists before it, we must either go on to infinity, which is impossible in natural causes... or we must come to some first thing that presupposes no other. And this can only be God. For it was shown (C.G. I, xvii) that He is not the matter of any thing, nor can there be any thing other than God the being of which is not caused by God.... It follows therefore that God in producing His effects requires no pre-jacent matter out of which to produce His work.

For a helpful discussion of the creative causality of God, cfr. Gilson; Spirit of Med. Phil.: chap. v, on "Analogy, Causality and Finality," pp. 84--107.

slightest vestige of dependence, depend upon a pre-existing something in order to produce the universe? Is God First Being? Supreme Being? First Cause? Then there is no "pre-existing something"; then God created His effects in the manner suitable to His nature, by the power of His Being, in virtue of His being First Cause.

This is not equivalent to saying that the world was produced without a cause. On the contrary, the existence of any created effect requires the existence of a First Cause. The amoeba exists; therefore, God exists. That is just as convincing as to say that, since the Rocky Mountains exist, God exists. If there are beings that are not their own cause,--and there are,--they demand a First Cause. If this First Cause produced any effects, He created them.

God is the cause of creatures in fieri, but He is also the cause of their continuance in being; He is their cause in esse. The existence of a creature is contingent in its origin; it remains contingent. Every moment added to the period of a creature's existence is a gift of God, is an effect of His continuous causality. Second causes may be the cause of the becoming of a thing; they can not participate in God's causality in esse. Men may build houses; they only use the materials at their disposal; they neither produced these materials (except as second causes) nor can they keep them in existence. They paint and oil and varnish the surfaces exposed, to retard the process of deterioration that inevitably occurs. And yet the giant redwoods appear youthful and vigorous in spite of their centuries upon centuries of existence. Created being is dependent on God

not only for its becoming but equally as much for its conservation in being. God wills the beginning, or the actuality of the creature's existence; as long as it continues its existence, it does so because God wills to preserve it.<sup>30</sup>

So utterly dependent on God is the creature that if God's concurrence were to be withdrawn, the creature would be incapable of action. The principle of God as First Mover applies as much to the activities of individual creatures as it does to the question of motion in general. God is the First Principle of every kind of motion, hence of every operation of created being. Created action without the concurrence of Divine action is as inconceivable as love unsustained by the lover, or as the fragrance of the lily continued independently of the lily's existence.<sup>31</sup>

By predicating of God the pure perfections of His creatures we have been able to say, in a very inadequate way, what God is. The knowledge

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<sup>30</sup>St. Thomas, Contra Gent., III, Pt. 1, chap. lxxv, p. 155:

The cause of a thing must needs be the same as the cause of its preservation; because preservation is nothing else than continued existence.... Now God is the cause of everything's existence by His intellect and will. Therefore by His intellect and will He preserves things in existence.

<sup>31</sup>St. Thomas, Contra Gent., III, Pt. 1, chap. lxxvii, p. 161:

Now, since God not only gave existence to things when they first began to exist, but also causes existence in them as long as they exist, by preserving them in existence,...so, not only did He give them active forces when He first made them but is always causing those forces in them. Consequently, if the divine influence were to cease, all operation would come to an end. Therefore every operation of a thing is reducible to Him as its cause.



of God that flows from the vision of His essence is incomparably superior to that derived from His effects; His effects are only God's similitudes; they are not God. In our present state, however, the names given to God from His effects help us to acquire true and certain knowledge of Him; that knowledge is necessarily imperfect because it consists of concepts derived from creatures and predicated by creatures of the Infinite God from Whom all creatures proceed.

Like St. Augustine, we address ourselves to creatures, asking them to tell us what it is we love, when we love God. The earth and everything in it acknowledges that it is only participated being; it is not God. When we ask creatures to tell us something about God, their unanimous reply is, "He made us".<sup>32</sup> Because God gave being to His creatures, and made creatures to be, in a manner, like Himself, the perfections of created forms tell us something of the excellence of Him, according to Whose

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<sup>32</sup>St. Augustine: The Confessions of St. Augustine, translated by E. B. Pusey, Frederick Stokes Co., New York, 1909, p. 269 ff.:

But what do I love when I love Thee?....I asked the earth, and it answered me, 'I am not He'; and whatsoever are in it confessed the same.... And I replied unto all the things which encompassed the door of my flesh: 'Ye have told me of my God, that ye are not He; tell me something of Him'. And they cried out with a loud voice, 'He made us'. My questioning them, was my thoughts on them, and their form of beauty gave the answer.

...because...reason is set over their senses to judge on what they report,...men can ask, so that the invisible things of God are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made. (Rom. I, 20).

likeness they were made.<sup>35</sup>

Lest the validity of these conclusions be questioned on grounds of their being mutually contradictory, the several objections that might be raised concerning them will be briefly considered and, it is hoped, satisfactorily answered.

God, we have said, is absolutely simple and supremely one. We have denied that the potentiality of material and composite beings can be predicated of God. We have made various positive predications of God and have stressed the formal sense in which these attributions are to be taken. Have we, it may be asked, by our formal predication of a plurality of attributes implicitly denied the simplicity of God? Can goodness, intelligence, will and other names be attributed of an absolutely simple Being without compromising His simplicity, unless the predication be not formal,

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<sup>35</sup> St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 13, art. 2, cor.:

These names signify the divine substance and are predicated substantially of God, although they fall short of a full representation of Him.... Now since our intellect knows God from creatures, it knows Him as far as creatures represent Him. Now it was shown above (q. 4, art. 2) that God prepossesses in Himself all the perfections of creatures, being Himself simply and universally perfect. Hence every creature represents Him, and is like Him so far as it possesses some perfection; yet it represents Him not as something of the same species or genus, but as the excellencing principle of whose form the effects fall short, although they derive some kind of likeness thereto.... Therefore the aforesaid names [ e.g., life, goodness ] signify the divine substance, but in an imperfect manner, even as creatures represent it imperfectly.

but virtual? But if the predication is virtual only, can we be said to name God from His effects?

Again, it may be asked, how, since God is One, can knowledge of the many enable us to name the attributes of the One. If the various names predicated of God are synonyms, between which there is but a verbal distinction, then the unity of God would seem to be safeguarded. If, however, these various predications are to be understood as having a real foundation in God, are we not predicating real multiplicity of Him?

Thomistic philosophy solves these apparently irreconcilable difficulties without denying either the unity and simplicity of God or the formal sense in which the pure perfections of creatures are predicated of Him. The way in which this solution is effected will be briefly explained.

Since God is the First Cause, the Divine Creator, it follows that created beings of whatever kind they may be receive their existence from God.<sup>34</sup> But they are finite. No finite being can contain the fullness of Divine perfection. If it did, it would not be finite but infinite being; it would be God. In communicating goodness or intelligence or any other perfection that is in Him intrinsically or formally, God causes that which exists in Him essentially, (therefore, simply and unitedly), to exist in the participated being of His effects according to their mode

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<sup>34</sup>St. Thomas, Cont. Gent., II, chap. xv, p. 19:

...Therefore, from Him is everything that, in any way whatever, is....

of existence, (consequently, as manifold and divided).<sup>35</sup> Obviously, this is the only way in which finite beings can participate in the pure perfection of Infinite Being. That is why we have, in creatures, multiplied representations of the unlimited perfection of an absolutely simple God. It also explains why man, who, in this present life, knows God only as created things manifest Him, multiplies the names by which He signifies God. Since the perfections of creatures are manifold, the concepts derived from these perfections are correspondingly multiplied. But God, of Whom these various concepts are formally predicated, possesses these and all possible perfections simply. God is supremely one, He is simple and absolutely perfect Being.<sup>36</sup>

To say that pure perfections are only virtually predicated of God would be to imply the denial of the very thesis we are seeking to prove. St. Thomas explicitly states that names, such as good, or living, signify what can be essentially predicated of God.<sup>37</sup> If they merely signified

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<sup>35</sup>St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 13, art. 5, cor.:

...perfections pre-exist in God unitedly and simply, whereas in creatures they are received, divided and multiplied.

<sup>36</sup>St. Thomas, Contra Gent., I, chap. xxxi, p. 75:

... God by His one simple being possesses all manner of perfections, which in a much lower degree others attain by various means. Whence it is clear how it is necessary to give several names to God. For, since we cannot know Him naturally except by reaching Him from His effects, it follows that the terms by which we denote His perfection must be diverse, as also are the perfections which we find in things.

<sup>37</sup>St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 13, art. 2, cor.:

...For in saying that God lives, they [ those who speak of God ] assuredly mean more than to say He is the cause of our life....

Therefore we must hold...that these names signify the divine substance, and are predicated substantially of God....

that God is the cause of goodness or of living, we could learn nothing of the essence of God from His created effects and God would in truth be unknowable.<sup>38</sup>

What creatures are by participation, that God is essentially. Because God is Being a se, He is infinite and eternal Goodness; He is subsistent Goodness. Similarly, it may be said that God is subsistent Intelligence or Wisdom or Truth or simply, God is subsistent Being. In a word, the various perfections predicated of God are in Him, not as really distinct, but as really identified although in all other beings perfections are really distinct. The plurality of names signifies various aspects of the same Divine Reality according as these were apprehended by us in their created and composite likenesses. (Composition is not to be ascribed to that which is understood,--God, but to that which understands, viz., the human mind).<sup>39</sup> By means of a composite idea, (for knowledge is according to the mode of the knower), the intellect understands God to be simple

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<sup>38</sup>St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 13, art. 2, cor.:

Neither...are names applied to God and creatures in a purely equivocal sense, as some have said. Because if that were so, it follows that from creatures nothing could be known or demonstrated about God at all; for the reasoning would always be exposed to the fallacy of equivocation.

<sup>39</sup>St. Thomas, Contra Gent., I, chap. xxxvi, p. 81:

For although our intellect arrives at the knowledge of God by various conceptions,...it understands that what corresponds to them all is absolutely one: because our intellect does not ascribe its mode of understanding to the things which it understands, even as neither does it ascribe immateriality to a stone although it knows it immaterially.

and one.<sup>40</sup>

If man were able to know God as He is in Himself instead of as He is manifested by His effects, he would not multiply the names of God; he would employ one name to signify God's essence.<sup>41</sup> The plurality of names is not, however, a denial of the unity of God for man understands that the same Divine Being is signified by the various names predicated of God.

These names, although they are attributions of the One God, have not the same meaning. They are not synonymous.<sup>42</sup> They signify different aspects of One God. Furthermore, as applied to this One God, these different concepts must be understood to have a real foundation in God. If they did not, there would be no reality to conform to our ideas of God; manifestly the ideas would then be false.<sup>43</sup> God is essentially good,

<sup>40</sup> St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 13, art. 12, cor.:

God however, as considered in Himself is altogether one and simple, yet our intellect knows Him by different conceptions because it cannot see Him as He is in Himself. Nevertheless, although it understands Him under different conceptions, it knows that one and the same simple object corresponds to its conceptions.

<sup>41</sup> St. Thomas, Contra Gent., I, chap. xxxi, p. 75:

If...we were able to understand His very essence as it is, and to give Him a proper name, we should express Him by one name only.

<sup>42</sup> St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 13, art. 4, cor.:

...although the names applied to God signify one thing, still because they signify that thing under many and different aspects, they are not synonymous....synonymous terms signify one thing under one aspect....

<sup>43</sup> St. Thomas, Contra Gent., I, chap. xxxv, p. 81:

Wherefore our understanding is neither false nor vain in conceiving many things of one;...And according to its various conceptions our intellect devises various names which it applies to God. Wherefore, since they are not applied with the same meaning, it is clear that they are not synonymous although they signify a thing absolutely one; for the name has not the same meaning, since it denotes the concept of the intellect previously to the thing understood.

essentially wise and so forth. Goodness does not mean wisdom; when we predicate both of God we mean that His perfection comprises both essential goodness and essential wisdom.

The various names predicated of God express concepts which the intellect formed, considering God as the Source or ultimate Cause of certain created perfections. These concepts are primarily significative of things as known by the mind. The name used denotes, not the concept, but the thing known. It is by reasoning from perfections as found in creatures to those same perfections in their necessary Cause, that concepts of God are formed. Different names of God signify really different concepts, although the manifold perfections represented by those concepts are identified in the absolute unity of God.<sup>44</sup>

The infinity of God's perfection could never be expressed in a single concept or word unless that word were divine. We see then, that it is because God so far surpasses the human intellect that names predicated of God are many although God is One. It matters not whether we say that it is on account of God's infinite perfection or on account of the limitations

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St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 13, art. 5, ad 3 um:

The perfect unity of God requires that what are manifold and divided in others should exist in Him simply and unitedly. Thus it comes about that He is one in reality and yet multiple in idea because our intellect apprehends Him in a manifold manner, as things represent Him.

Ibid. q. 13, art. 5, ad 2 um:

The many aspects of these names are not empty and vain, for there corresponds to all of them one simple reality represented by them in a manifold and imperfect manner.

of human intelligence that a plurality of names is predicated of God.<sup>45</sup> In either case it becomes evident that names of God are many, first, because created perfections are many; the multiplicity and variety of creatures is, as it were, God's way of "compensating" for the inability of the finite perfectly to reproduce the Infinite. Second, names of God are many because the finite intellect can acquire knowledge of the Infinite only according to its mode of being; its very nature requires it to employ many concepts. It is by reasoning from the manifold perfections of finite beings that man is led to conclude that in their First Cause, perfections that appear in creatures as many and diversified, necessarily exist as one. His names are many, but God is One.

We have seen that man is indebted to the creature for the positive attributions that natural reason can make of God. From the perfections of His effects, whether they are the perfections of an amoeba or of a Rocky Mountain system, of a stone or of man,--from these perfections we name the perfection of God. It is the finite, manifold and diversified

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<sup>45</sup>St. Thomas, Sentences, d. 2, q. 1, a. 3, as quoted by Garrigou-Lagrange, op. cit. Vol. II, p. 6, footnote 7:

That God exceeds the power of our intellect is due, on the part of God Himself, to the plenitude of His perfection, and also on our part, to the feebleness of the intellect which fails to comprehend this perfection. Hence it is evident that a plurality of these notions is not only due to the nature of our intellect but also because of God Himself, in that His perfection surpasses each concept of our intellect. Therefore, there is something in the object which corresponds to the plurality of those notions, as to what God is, not indeed the plurality of the object, but a fullness of perfection, and hence it comes that about that these concepts are applied to it.



reproductions of Infinite perfection manifested by creatures that make it possible for us to know, not only that God exists, not only that He has not the imperfections of composite or created beings, but that God is, essentially, what His effects are by participation; He is, intrinsically, and, therefore, in a sovereign degree, what He has caused His creatures to be in an essentially limited way: Formaliter ominenter, God is good, true, intelligent and living, for, no perfection can be wanting to Him Who is subsisting Being.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 4, art. 2, cor.:

...Since therefore God is subsisting being itself, nothing of the perfection of being can be wanting to Him. Now all created perfections are included in the perfection of being; for things are perfect, precisely so far as they have being after some fashion. It follows therefore that the perfection of no one thing is wanting to God.

Ibid. ad 3:

...existence does not include life and wisdom, because that which participates in existence need not participate in every mode of existence; nevertheless God's existence includes in itself life and wisdom, because nothing of the perfection of being can be wanting to Him Who is subsisting being itself.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE METAPHYSIC OF ANALOGICAL PREDICATION

We have discovered manifold perfections in created things. We have concluded that these created perfections exist in God in a manner befitting His essence; that is, God is essentially what His creature is by participation. What exists in God in a sovereign degree is received by the creature according to the determinations of its essence. Is the creature being? Or good? Or true? It is so because the Divine Agent from Whom it proceeds is Being, is Goodness, is Truth.

Attributions of this kind are not univocal; they lack the absolute unity of generic predication. Absolute unity in a concept applicable to the creature and to God is not possible, for God is infinitely removed from the significations of genera and species. To claim univocity for such predications does no honor to God or to man. To regard the names derived from creatures and attributed to God as totally diverse would be equivalent to a flat denial of all knowledge of God. Between the absolute unity of univocal predication and the utter lack of unity in purely equivocal predication lies the predication of perfections by analogy.

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Here we are confronted with the problem that forms the crux of this entire investigation of the existence and nature of God. How can a predication made of both the finite and the Infinite have any meaning? If a

concept is primarily applicable to the creature from whom it is derived, how can it in any sense be applicable to God? If St. Thomas names God from the creature, how does he span the immeasurable distance that separates being from Being? How can that be called "knowledge", which is affirmed of things between which there are essential differences of indefinable degree?

Briefly, the answer to all these questions is contained in the doctrine of the analogy of being. By analogical predication we predicate an attribute of the creature and of God, but, as applied to God, it is freed from the limitations which attend it in the creature. We see at once that the attribute as applicable to the creature does not mean exactly the same as it does when that same attribute is applied to God. Still the two predications are not wholly dissimilar. We may say, they are partly alike and partly different.<sup>1</sup>

There are many analogical terms. All positive perfections formally attributed to God, such, for instance, as were noted in the second chapter, are predicated analogically. Each predication is expressive of a particular meaning yet all combine in a united effort to give human expression to

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<sup>1</sup> St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 13, art. 5, cor.:

For we can name God only from creatures. Thus, whatever is said of God and creatures, is said according to the relation of a creature to God as its principle and cause, wherein all perfections of things pre-exist excellently. Now this mode of community of idea is a mean between pure equivocation and simple univocation. For in analogies the idea is not, as it is in univocals, one and the same, yet it is not totally diverse as in equivocals.

the incomprehensible greatness of God, Whose indivisible unity we affirm even while we name Him Wisdom, Goodness, Truth or any other of the various analogical terms by which we signify God.

Among these numerous analogical terms there is one to which practically all the others can be reduced, that, namely, of being. Being is fundamental to the entire Thomistic metaphysic; it is a concept to which all others are in some way related.<sup>2</sup> If the analogy of being is used to illustrate Thomistic metaphysic, the reason for doing so should be clear.

We began our study of God's existence with composite being. We sought the cause of the becoming of composite being in Being that never becomes because it is the plenitude of perfection. The point from which we started was being as known through experience; the Being to which our reasoned conclusion led us lies infinitely beyond the scope of direct experience; still, because we know being that begins to be or ceases to exist, we know that there is a Being Who neither begins nor ceases to be.

The predication of being of the finite and of the Infinite is not purely attributive nor is it purely negative. The only kind of being immediately known to us is being composed of potency and act. When we affirm being of God, it is not the essentially limited existence of, let us

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<sup>2</sup> Olgiati-Zybura: The Key to the Study of St. Thomas translated from the Italian of Olgiati by Zybura. Herder Book Co., St. Louis, 1929, p. 44: For St. Thomas, the supreme principles of thought and reality stand in intimate relation to the metaphysical concepts of being.

Note: The theme of this entire treatise is that the "key" to the understanding of St. Thomas' philosophy is an understanding of his concept of being.

say, the amoeba, that we mean, nor that of the Rocky Mountains, nor that implied in the nature of any created essence. It is the perfection, being, per se, that is attributed to God; the manner or mode of its created form is denied of Him. Analogical predications express perfections common to many but possessed by the many in widely different ways.

No one will deny that the stone is possessed of being. Being may also be predicated of the amoeba though no one will deny that living being is higher in form than inorganic being. Man, too, may be called a being, but he outranks the amoeba by all the difference between a unicellular organism and a rational being. Man is infinitely less than the Supreme Being to Whom he owes the excellence of his human nature. Despite the vast difference between the various kinds of being referred to, each is entitled to the name, being.<sup>3</sup>

What is it that makes possible this common predication of a term to things essentially unlike? In other words, what is the basis of analogical predication?

Between the essentially varied kinds of being indicated above, there is some resemblance, some similarity in the midst of difference that enables us to predicate the same term, analogically, of all. It is of things

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<sup>3</sup> St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 13, art. 5, ad 1 um:

... all univocal predications are reduced to one first non-univocal analogical predication, which is being.

that at once resemble and differ from each other that analogical predication can be made.<sup>4</sup> It is by predication of this kind that we attain to knowledge, imperfect but true, of the formal attributes of God.

Being is defined as that whose act is existence. We said that the existence of objects whose being implied becoming, proved that there exists a Being in Whom there is only pure act. In going from beings to Being we have implied every essence, real or possible, from the lowest to the Supreme Being upon Whose act the existence of each finite object depends. And we have called each by the analogous term, being. The amoeba, the mountain, the man, and God, each has the kind of being, limited or unlimited, that is proper to its essence. In each particular kind of being there is a relation of essence to existence, or, in finite things, that of potency to act, that is intrinsic to it.

There are two ways in which analogy may arise in connection with this intrinsic relation. We may speak of two objects essentially unlike each other, e.g., the mountain and man. The relation of essence to existence that determines one to the nature of a mountain is similar to the relation

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<sup>4</sup>St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 4, art. 3, ad 1 um:

....the same things can be like and unlike to God: like, according as they imitate Him, as far as He, who is not perfectly imitable, can be imitated; unlike according as they fall short of their cause, not merely in intensity and remission,...but because they are not in agreement, specifically or generically.

Maritain: Degrees of Knowledge, translated by Bernard Wall, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1938, p. 281:

The Divine essence, constituted as an object for us, not in itself, but by the objectivation of created subjects (considered in their perfections of a transcendental order), is attained and known in things which at once resemble and infinitely differ from it.

that determined the other to the nature of man. Upon this similarity (not conformity) of relations intrinsic to diverse natures, analogy is based. It is because the relation of mountain to its existence bears some conformity to the relation of man to his existence, that both can be termed being. A conformity of this kind is not a fixed proportion. The being of mountain is vastly different from the being of man. What is more, it is mountain as being that is similar to the being of man. The unity that makes them similar is not that of a defined relation; it is that of a similarity of relations in the midst of essential differences. This relation is intrinsic to the object in which it is found but it is not for that reason equal to the relation of the object to which it is analogous. In fact, it can not be equal; if it were, the predication would be univocal, not analogical.

There is in every being, finite or Infinite, an intrinsic relation between that being and its manner of existence. God is related to His Being as Pure Act is to Pure Act; the creature is related to its being as potency is to act, or as essence is related to existence.<sup>5</sup> The intrinsic relation between God and His Being, absolutely simple, is not one with the

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<sup>5</sup> St. Thomas, Contra Gent., II, chap. liii, p. 125:

Whatsoever participates a thing is compared to the thing participated as potentiality to act: since by that which is participated the participator is made to be actually such. Now it was shown above (chap. 15) that God alone is essentially being, and all other things participate being. Therefore every created substance is compared to its being as potentiality to act.



relation of the creature to its existence.<sup>6</sup> Still, there is between these relations a similarity, or, to speak more technically, a proportionality. Upon this proportionality are based our analogical predications of the perfections of God as manifested by His effects.

We have said, God is intelligent; all <sup>of</sup> knowledge is His. The concept is analogical. We have experience of human knowledge, which denoted apprehension of the intelligible or, union of the thing known and the knower. Human knowledge is dependent on sensible data; it must differ essentially from the knowledge predicated of an absolutely simple and immutable Being. What is more, we use the word knowledge analogically whenever we use it to refer to sensation; it too is a union of the thing known with the knower, but by means of a sensible species. The difference between sensation and intellection is an essential difference; one requires a material, the other an immaterial faculty. Still, both are correctly named knowledge, for both refer to union between a cognitive faculty and its proper object, the result of which is knowledge. This union or knowledge exists also in God, but in a way that differs from human knowledge, by as much as God differs from

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<sup>6</sup> St. Thomas, Contra Gent., I, chap. xxxii, p. 77:

Now nothing is predicated in the same order of God and other things, but, according to priority and posteriority: since all predicates of God are essential for He is called being because He is very essence, and good because He is goodness itself; whereas predicates are applied to others by participation...Therefore it is impossible for any thing to be predicated univocally of God and other things.

man. Why is the analogous term, knowledge, applied to these essentially different ways of knowing? Because there is a proportional relation existing between sensation, human intellection and Divine intellection. Because sensation is related to the sensible as intellection is related to the intelligible, we refer to sensation and to intellection, human and divine, as knowledge. The relation of sensation to the sensible is intrinsic. So too, is the relation of intellection to the intelligible. Between these two intrinsic relations there is a conformity or proportional unity, (implied in the word "as"), that forms the foundation of the common predication of knowledge.<sup>7</sup>

<u>Sensation</u>		<u>intellection</u>		<u>knowledge</u>
the sensible	as	the intelligible	=	

The analogical predication of being rests upon the same proportional

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<sup>7</sup> St. Thomas, De veritate, q. 2, art. 11 (quoted by Lagrange: God, His Existence and His Nature, Vol. II, p. 216):

Hence it must be said that the word 'knowledge', is predicated of God's knowledge and ours, not altogether univocally, nor purely equivocally, but analogically; this is the same as saying that it is predicated proportionally. Conformity according to proportion can be twofold...there may be conformity between two terms not proportionate to each other, but which are proportional, as between 6 and 4, for 6 is to 3 as 4 is to 2. ...between creatures and God there is but a similarity of proportions or a proportionality, such as exists between our intelligence and the sense of sight: the intelligence is to the intelligible being what sight is to color, and this similarity of proportions can be expressed by the word 'knows'. [ Or ] .... because as sense perception is in the eye, so intellectual perception in the mind.... there is no question of a determinate relation between those things which have something in common analogically, and therefore according to that mode [ analogy of proportionality ] there is no reason why a name should not be predicated analogically of God and of the creature. But still this happens in two ways: (metaphorically and properly....And properly for those things) which include nothing defective in their definition, and which do not depend upon matter for their existence, such as being, goodness and others of this kind.

unity. The stone is related to its existence as the plant to its existence and as man is related to his existence. Each exists, but in an essentially different manner; each is being, but the degrees of perfection proper to each vary as do their essences. The existing stone is not like the existing plant or animal. It is not, then, their essences that make them similar; on the contrary, they constitute the basis of their difference. And while we may say that each exists, the manner of existence is in each case determined by the essence. What is common to all, what forms the basis of the common predication of being is the proportional unity found in the relation present in each, between its essence and its existence. In everything that is, this intrinsic relation between essence and existence is present. It is the relation in each, between essence and existence, between the creature and its being, between the Divine Agent and His being, that makes the creature and the Creator proportionally one; it is this proportional unity that renders possible the common predication of being, of goodness, of truth, to created being as we know it and to the Divine Agent Who caused it to be what it is.

The concept of cause is itself analogical. God is pure act; He is that Being Whose act is eternal existence. The creature has only participated, not essential existence. The creature may also act in the capacity of cause, but, because it is contingent being, its causality, like its being, is participated; that is, the creature is always dependent, in the exercise of its causality, upon the First Cause. Or, we may say that because God is Pure Being He is the First Cause; His causality, rooted in

the very nature of His infinite Being, is the causality of First Act. But creatures, effects of God's causal action, can exercise a degree of causality that is fixed and determined by the form of being proper to them. Theirs is the causality of second act, dependent in every aspect of the operation of that causality upon the concurrence of the First Cause. A creature may exercise causality in so far as it is;<sup>8</sup> causal activity is not something added to being; it is merely one aspect of the actuality of being; it is one of the manifold ways in which being resembles Being, not only as being but as being a cause, as exercising the causality proper to it as a specific kind of being.<sup>9</sup>

In the common attribution of causality to created and to uncreated

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<sup>8</sup> St. Thomas, Contra Gent., II, chap xxi, pp. 32 & 33:

Whatever is caused with respect to some particular nature, cannot be the first cause of that nature, but only a second...cause...Now every substance other than God has being caused by another.... Wherefore it is impossible for it to be a cause of being otherwise than...as acting by virtue of another.

Ibid.: p. 34: Since every agent acts in so far as it is actual, it follows that the mode of action must follow the mode of a thing's actuality ....Consequently anything whose actuality is determined to genus, species, and accident, must have a power determined to effects like the agent as such: since every agent produces its like.

<sup>9</sup> St. Thomas, Contra Gent., III, Pt. 1, chap. lxx, p. 174:

...wherefore it was His will to communicate His likeness to things not only in the point of their being but also in the point of their being causes of other things: for it is in these two ways that all creatures in common have the divine likeness bestowed on them....

cf. Gilson: The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy, chap. v, on "Analogy, Causality and Finality".

Being,<sup>10</sup> the basis of the predication is the proportional unity by which the relation of a second cause to its actuality resembles the relation of the First Cause to His actuality. The creature as cause is possessed of an efficiency determined by its form or perfection of being; God as cause is possessed of an efficiency flowing from His form or perfection of Being. The difference between the degrees of causality is infinite; the relation of causality to being is common to both. Although the relation is indeterminate, its similarity gives it the proportional unity that enables us to predicate cause, as we predicate being, of both God and the creature.

As we predicate being or cause of both God and the creature, by analogy of proportionality, certain other predicates implied in the concept of being or of cause can also be predicated of both. The unity of God, the goodness of God, and truth in God are related to His Being as the unity, goodness and truth of the creature are related to its being. God is simply one; the creature is one by reason of its composite unity; analogically, God and the creature are one. Since God is pure Being, no perfections are lacking to Him. Therefore, He is essentially what He has caused His effects to be, by communicating to them a degree of participation in His actuality,

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<sup>10</sup>St. Thomas, Contra Gent., III, Pt. 1, chap. xxi, p. 42:

... the agent gives to its natural effect not only those natural principles whereby it subsists, but also those whereby it is a cause of other things; thus the animal, when begotten, receives from its begetter both the power of self-nourishment, and the power of generation. Therefore the effect tends to be like the agent, not only in the point of species, but also in the point of its causality of other things. Now things tend to be like God even as effects tend to be like the agent.... Therefore things have a natural tendency towards a divine likeness in this, that they are causes of other beings.

being, or causality. That is why, by means of analogy, we predicate of God the perfections of intelligence, will, and so forth, knowing that the pure perfections known to us in their contingent modes of being must necessarily exist in the Divine Principle whence they proceed, according to His mode of existence.<sup>11</sup>

The metaphysic of proportional unity that renders essentially dissimilar things similar, or analogous, is the basis of naming God from His creatures.

The analogical predications made of creatures and of God, as just explained, employ analogy of proper proportionality. That is, the predication is to be taken in its literal sense. God, in virtue of what is proper to the essential nature of the Deity, is being, or goodness, or intelligence. Predications are sometimes made in which the proportionality is not literal,

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<sup>11</sup>St. Thomas, Contra Gent., I, xxix, p. 72:

Since then what is in God perfectly is found in other things by way of an imperfect participation, that in which likeness is observed is God's simply but not the creature's. And thus the creature has what is God's and therefore is rightly said to be like God.

St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 4, art. 2, cor:  
All created perfections are in God.

St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 4, art. 3, ad 3 um:  
Likeness of creatures to God is not affirmed on account of agreement in form according to the formality of the same genus or species, but solely according to analogy, inasmuch as God is essential being, whereas others are beings by participation.

Ibid.: I a, q. 13, art. 5, cor.:

...whatever is said of God and creatures, is said according to the relation of a creature to God as its principle and cause, wherein all perfections of things pre-exist excellently.

but figurative. Thus, we sometimes speak of God as being jealous or angry. Such predications are based on a proportionality that is metaphorical; they yield no knowledge of God's intrinsic perfection.

It will be remembered that only the pure perfections of His creatures are attributable to God. Jealousy, anger, and all such concepts imply a corporeal nature. But God is incorporeal; passions can not be predicated of God except figuratively, that is, by metaphorical proportionality. God, because He is just, punishes evil. His punishments may seem to us to resemble the effects of anger. For want of a better way of describing the effects of God's justice upon evil doers, we employ words that imply but do not express the comparison employed. Thus, instead of saying that God's acts are like the acts of one who has been justly angered, we speak of an "angry God". Metaphorical proportionality may be employed for purposes of effective illustration concerning God; it is never more than it claims to be, viz., a figurative way of speaking of God; its predications are not formal.<sup>12</sup>

There is another kind of analogy that must be noted here, not because it adds to, but because it does not add to our natural knowledge of God, although its use is common. That analogy, called analogy of attribution, is based on a proportion or conformity between two related terms. The

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<sup>12</sup> St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 13, art. 6, cor.:

Thus, all names applied metaphorically to God, are applied to creatures primarily rather than to God, because when said of God they mean only similitude to such creatures. For, as smiling applied to a field means only that the field in the beauty of its flowering is like to the beauty of the human smile by proportionate likeness, so the name lion applied to God means only that God manifests strength in His works as a lion in his.

relation in analogy of attribution is one of dependence, but it is determinate; that is, it is according to a fixed ratio between the two members of the proportion.<sup>13</sup> Being may again be used to illustrate. We name substance being (per se); accidents, too, are named being, but theirs is being in alio. The accident depends on the substance for its being although the substance may exist independently of the accident; the relation in analogy of attribution may be non-mutual. Again, the analogous term may signify various proportions to some one thing. Thus, we predicate health of a man. But we may predicate health of many other things in which, literally speaking, it is not present. The predication is based on an extrinsic but real (not figurative) connection between the things of which it is analogically predicated and the man, of whom it is primarily predicated.<sup>14</sup> We commonly

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<sup>13</sup>St. Thomas, De veritate, q. 2, art. 11, (quoted by Garrigou-Lagrange, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 216):

There may be conformity between two terms which are proportionate to each other according to a fixed ratio, as between 2 and 1; 2 is the double of 1....

Hence according to [ this ] mode of conformity we find something analogically predicated of two things which bear a relation to each other, like ens which is predicated of substance and accident, because of the relation which substance bears to accident. And both the urine and the animal are said to be healthy because of some connection which urine has with the health of the animal....

... Because, therefore, according to this mode of analogical predication, there must be some determinate relation between those things which have something analogically in common, it is impossible for anything according to this mode to be predicated of God and of the creature.

<sup>14</sup>St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 13, art. 5, cer.:

Now names are thus used in two ways; either according as many things are proportionate to one, thus for example healthy is predicated of medicine and urine in relation and in proportion to health of body, of which the latter is the sign and the former the cause; or according as one thing is proportionate to another, thus healthy is said of medicine and animal, since medicine is the cause of health in the animal body.



speak of a healthy complexion or of a healthy appetite. We are constantly being advised that pineapple juice is healthy; the physician may tell us that long walks are healthy; the teacher of hygiene may tell his pupils that soap and water are healthy; the psychologist will insist that "sublimation" is healthy. Here we have a variety of terms, to each of which we have attributed the word, healthy. This predication tells us nothing of the kind of complexion the person has, nor of what a healthy appetite consists; we learn nothing of what pineapple juice looks like or tastes like or is like from saying it is "healthy"; nor does the term, healthy, as applied to a long walk or to soap and water or to sublimation inform us concerning their nature. Plainly then, predications that signify the relation of cause to effect, or of means to an end, or any proportion extrinsic to the object of which it is predicated give us no knowledge of the essential character of that object. Furthermore, since analogy of attribution is based on a determinate relation or proportion, it does not apply to predications of Divine being for, between God and creatures, relations are always indeterminate. It is therefore impossible for anything to be predicated of God and the creature by means of analogy of attribution. The metaphysic of analogical predication takes cognizance of analogy of attribution, of metaphorical proportionality and of proper proportionality. It is the analogy of proper proportionality, and that analogy only, that enables man to predicate being

and other pure perfections of the creature and of God.<sup>15</sup>

Denial of proportional or analogical unity leads to one of several positions. One may deny that there is unity of any kind either in things or in the mind. This reduces the value of names to that of a common "ticket" standing impartially for any member of the class. Knowledge is accordingly restricted to the singular, as apprehended by individual sense-impression. Knowledge of this type does not permit us to name God from creatures; strictly speaking, it denies even knowledge of creatures.

If unity is upheld, but as a formation of the mind, constructed independently of things, then knowledge is purely subjective; since it lacks objective foundation it implicitly denies to things the power of communicating to the mind knowledge of themselves or of their Maker.

Proportional unity may be denied in favor of absolute unity. In that case, predication made of both creatures and God are univocal and we are brought to the necessity of identifying God with His creatures and creatures with God.

In the metaphysic of St. Thomas Aquinas, the proportional unity of analogical predication holds a position midway between the denial of unity (equivocation) and the claim for absolute unity (univocity).<sup>16</sup> It is the

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<sup>15</sup>Phelan, Dr. G. B., St. Thomas and Analogy, Marquette University Press Milwaukee, 1941, p. 39, ff:

The analogy of proper proportionality alone accounts for the diversity of beings and their unity in being....The basis of diversity in beings is the division of being by potency and act--existence (esse) is diversified by essence (or form) and in beings in which there is diversity within the essence that diversity is caused by the composition of matter and form... Diversity results from the manifold limitations of act by potency....It is this analog of proper proportionality which gives validity to all positive predication with respect to God in Whom all perfections subsist intrinsically and formally.

<sup>16</sup>St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 13, art. 5, cor.:

...this mode of community of idea is a mean between pure equivocation and simple univocation. For, in analogies the idea is not, as it is in univocals, one and the same, yet it is not totally diverse as in equivocals.

metaphysic of analogical predication that enables St. Thomas to begin his quest for natural knowledge of God with the things of sense, with anything the senses can perceive.<sup>17</sup> For, sensible things have not in themselves their raison d'être; they require the existence of Es a se. This First Being, in producing His effects, necessarily communicates to them some likeness to Himself.<sup>18</sup> The likeness is proportional; despite the infinity that separates God from His creatures, the creature shares in a limited way the act of existence which in God is eternal.<sup>19</sup> Because God exists necessarily, the creature exists, but contingently. Because God is good, true, intelligent, the creature is endowed with goodness, truth, and, in the case of

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<sup>17</sup>St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 12, art. 12, cor.:

Our natural knowledge begins with sense. Hence our natural knowledge can go as far as it can be led by sensible things.

<sup>18</sup>St. Thomas, Contra Gent., III, Pt. I, chap. xix, p. 38:

All creatures are images of the first agent, namely God: since the agent produces its like.

St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 4, art. 3, cor.:

... For, since every agent reproduces itself so far as it is an agent, and every thing acts according to the manner of its form, the effect must in some way resemble the form of the agent.

<sup>19</sup>St. Thomas, Contra Gent., I, chap. viii, p. 15:

... Sensible things from which human reason derives the source of its knowledge, retain a certain trace of likeness to God.... For effects resemble their causes according to their own mode, since like action proceeds from like agent; and yet the effect does not always reach to a perfect likeness to the agent.

St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 4, art. 3, cor.:

Therefore, if there is an agent not contained in any genus, its effects will still more distantly reproduce the form of the agent, not, that is, so as to participate in the likeness of the agent's form according to the same specific or generic formality, but only according to some sort of analogy; as existence is common to all.

human beings, with intelligence. By using his faculty of reason,<sup>20</sup> man can know that He Who communicates being to His effects is intrinsically possessed of the perfections He bestows on creatures according to the determinations of their respective essences. Proportionally, the creature is like His Creator. Therefore, the unity, goodness and pure perfections discovered in sensible things are to be essentially predicated of God. In making analogical predications, we remove from the perfection all that indicates its created mode; we raise it to the degree of supereminence worthy of God.<sup>20</sup> That is what we mean when we say, God is, according to

<sup>20</sup> St. Thomas, Contra Gent., I, chap. xxx, pp. 72-74:

For since every perfection of creatures is to be found in God, albeit in another and more eminent way, whatever terms denote perfection absolutely and without any defect whatever, are predicated of God and of other things; for instance, goodness, wisdom and so forth....

Now, I say that some of the aforesaid terms denote perfection without defect, as regards that which the term is employed to signify; for as regards the mode of signification every term is defective. For we express things by a term as we conceive them by the intellect: and our intellect, since its knowledge originates from the senses, does not surpass the mode which we find in sensible objects, wherein the form is distinct from the subject of the form, on account of the composition of form and matter.... Accordingly in every term employed by us, there is imperfection as regards the mode of signification, and imperfection is unbecoming to God, although the thing signified is becoming to God in some eminent way: as instanced in the term goodness or the good: for goodness signifies by way of non-subsistence, and the good signifies by way of concretion. In this respect no term is becomingly applied to God, but only in respect of that which the term is employed to signify... Now the mode of supereminence in which the aforesaid perfections are found in God, cannot be expressed in terms employed by us, except either by negation, as when we say God is eternal or infinite, or by referring Him to other things, as when we say that He is the first cause or the sovereign good. For we are able to grasp, not what God is, but what He is not, and the relations of other things to Him.

His essence, what the creature is according to its participated<sup>\*</sup> and finite manner of existence. Or, we may put it thus,

<u>created being</u> its essence	as	<u>Uncreated Being</u> His Essence
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From the existence, unity, goodness and intelligence manifested in His effects, we can say with certainty, God exists; He is one; He is good; He is intelligent.<sup>21</sup> Thus, by means of proper proportionality or analogical predication, we can name God from His creatures. Creatures may be said to be so many visible signs, bearing the impress of the Divine similitude. By knowing them we can acquire knowledge of the existence of God and also something concerning His essence. This knowledge of God's nature falls far short of the knowledge that results from the direct vision of God, but then, the Beatific Vision transcends the natural in itself and in the means by which it is attained. God has made His creatures witnesses to Himself. Through the evidence of sensible being, man can understand or know with certainty, (1), that God exists; (2), that He is unlike His creatures in their dependence on becoming; and that, (3), analogically He is like His created similitudes.

God has made natural knowledge of Himself possible. It to some He remains "the Unknowable", it is because some do not follow as far as their

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<sup>21</sup> St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 13, art. 5, cor.:

For we can name God only from creatures. Thus, whatever is said of God and creatures, is said according to the relation of a creature to God as its principle and cause, wherein all perfections of things pre-exist excellently.

reason would lead them; they fail to recognize created effects as analogues of the Divine Being and thus they fail to understand the manifold ways in which God caused sensible beings to represent the perfection of His Infinite Being.<sup>22</sup> Failing to see beings in their relation to Being, they do not recognize the creature as a term of that relation which binds finite to finite and all things to the Infinite, with the bond of metaphysical unity. There results a distortion of the perspective of being; what ought to be a "universe" becomes an utterly diversified multitude.

To those who deny the analogy of being, neither the becoming nor the being of the finite furnishes man with a means of acquiring natural knowledge of God. To such, God remains unknowable and the universe becomes correspondingly unintelligible. To the Thomist, the analogy of being confers proportional unity on the diversity of beings. The intrinsic relation of being to existence that is common to all, from the least of finite beings to Infinite Being, enables the philosopher to begin his inquiry concerning God's existence and His nature with the insufficiency of the finite and to reach positive conclusions about God's existence and His attributes.

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<sup>22</sup> St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 12, art. 12, cor.:

Our mind can not be led by sense so far as to see the essence of God; because the sensible effects of God do not equal the power of God as their cause. Hence from the knowledge of sensible things the whole power of God cannot be known... But because they are His effects and depend on their cause, we can be led from them so far as to know of God whether He exists, and to know of Him what must necessarily belong to Him, as the first cause of all things, exceeding all things caused by Him.

In so far as created things are being, St. Thomas would say they<sup>23</sup> are like God; they are His analogues. Because God has made creatures to His likeness, because He has made them His analogues, man can name God from His creatures;<sup>24</sup> their being, their goodness, their perfection, are certain though feeble evidence of the Being, the Goodness and the sovereign perfection of God.<sup>25</sup>

A brief recapitulation will bring this inquiry concerning natural knowledge of God to its logical conclusion.

Upon the unquestionable evidence of motion in the universe, of motion

<sup>23</sup> St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 4, art. 3, cor.:

...all created things, so far as they are beings, are like God as the first and universal principle of all being.

<sup>24</sup> St. Thomas, Contra Gent., I, chap. xxx, p. 72:

For since every perfection of creatures is to be found in God, albeit in another and more eminent way, whatever terms denote perfection absolutely and without any defect whatever, are predicated of God and of other things; for instance, goodness, wisdom, and so forth.

<sup>25</sup> St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 13, art. 2, cor.:

For these names express God, so far as our intellects know Him. Now since our intellect knows God from creatures, it knows Him as far as creatures represent Him.... God pre-possesses in Himself all the perfections of creatures, being Himself simply and universally perfect. Hence every creature represents Him and is like Him so far as it possesses some perfection; yet it represents Him not as something of the same species or genus, but as the excelling principle of whose form the effects fall short, although they derive some kind of likeness [ analogy ] thereto....

that implies potentiality, St. Thomas Aquinas builds up his a posteriori proof of the existence of a Being Who can produce motion in other beings but Who is not moved either by His own act or by the act of any other being, because He is the totality of being or perfection. There exist beings that become; therefore there exists a Being WHO IS, namely, God.

Having proven that God is, St. Thomas shows that God can be named from His creatures, as their Principle, by way of excellence and by way of remotion.<sup>26</sup>

Thus we see that, in Thomistic philosophy, man, a creature capable of reason, can, by beginning with sense data, arrive at true and certain knowledge of the existence of God and that, furthermore, he can say, albeit inadequately, what God is not and what God is.

This conclusion answers the question raised in the beginning of our inquiry: It proves that, in the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas, natural knowledge of God is possible.

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<sup>26</sup>St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I a, q. 13, art. 1, cor.:

... in this life we cannot see the essence of God; but we know God from creatures as their principle, and also by way of excellence and remotion.



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